DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 035 035 CG 004 784

AUTHOR	Rosenhan, David
TITLE	Determinants of Altruism: Observations for A Theory of Altruistic Development.
INSTITUTION	American Psychological Association, Washington, D.C.
SPONS AGENCY	National Inst. of Mental Health (DHEW), Bethesda, Md.
PUB DATE	Sep 69
NOTE	19p.; Paper presented at the American Psychological Association Convention, Washington, D.C., August 31--September 4, 1969
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$1.05
DESCRIPTORS	*Behavior, Empathy, *Human Relations, Interpersonal Relationship, Motivation, *Social Development, *Theories

ABSTRACT

Some observations on the nature of altruistic behavior and the consequences of these observations for a theoretical and experimental psychology of altruism are discussed. Altruistic behaviors are very pervasive since they satisfy a wide array of egotistical motivations in addition to having an autonomy of their own. Because of their ability to meet numerous human needs altruistic behaviors are difficult to interpret but it is suggested that normative altruism, which arises from maximizations of personal gain, and autonomous altruism, which is done for its own sake, may not be as separate as they appear and may develop from the same constellation of capacities. A theory of altruistic development is outlined which states that the first stage, normative altruism, is dominated by the dynamics of reward and punishment and this is characteristic of young children. Once children surrender egocentricity they become capable of an intermediate level called affective altruism and this involves experiencing the needs of others as your own, an alteration from egocentrism to allocentrism and the presence of empathy and sympathy. The final level of altruistic commitment requires the elements which characterize earlier stages plus prosocial affective learning. (RM)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

ED035035

Determinants of altruism: Observations for a theory of altruistic development

David Rosenhan

Swarthmore College

Paper presented at a symposium entitled Prosocial behavior in children: The determinants of giving and sharing. The annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, Washington, D.C., September, 1969.

CG004784

Determinants of altruism: Observations for a theory of altruistic development[1]

David Rosenhan

Swarthmore College

I should like to do two things today. First, I would like to offer some observations on the nature of altruistic or prosocial behavior, and to examine the consequences of these observations for a theoretical and experimental psychology of altruism. And second, very much against my better judgment, I should like to offer the outlines of a theory of altruistic development. Let me assure you that it will be very much an outline, brief and with gaping holes. The data, at least as far as I understand them, do not permit much more.

I would like for you to share an assumption with me, one that I believe could be documented with sufficient time, but for the moment needs to remain an assumption. It is that, far from being rare, altruistic behaviors are common and pervasive in all cultures, animal (Hebb and Thompson, 1968) and human. The behaviors that reflect love, kindness, helpfulness, courage, charitability, selflessness, care and courtesy and more -- all of these prosocial behaviors are customary, usual and necessary to social cohesion and structure. In family life, science, government and industry -- even there! -- acts of caring and concern are easily as common as those that reflect less. And if newspapers stress crime and murder, the failure of men to be all that they might be, these are the sensational exceptions that lend support to the ordinary rule. People are helpful, kind, courteous, loving and caring, responsible, committed, charitable and generally decent, far more often than not.

If I may make this assumption, it is certainly not because I believe that this is the best of all possible worlds. Far from it. Rather the pervasiveness of altruistic behavior is of interest to us because altruistic behavior can be instrumental to the gratification of a broad panorama of human motivations. We can achieve by being altruistic, as when we do well by doin' good. We can express anger by being altruistic. Some people kill with kindness. Selfishness can find altruistic expression, as when one hand washes the other. Appeasement also finds altruistic expression when we turn the other cheek. And you may remember the boy who was too fat to run, and too fat to fight, so he damn' well had to be nice. In short, we can seduce with kindness, dominate with kindness, hurt with kindness, pander with kindness, appease with kindness, climb with kindness, destroy with kindness.

We are also kind for its own sake, and loving for <u>its</u> own sake. For no better reason. We shall need to remember this in a moment.

It is no wonder, then, that altruistic behaviors are so common. Not only do they satisfy such a wide variety of personal dynamics -- wider and more easily, I believe, than any other class of behavior -- but they appear to have an autonomy of their own. Indeed, their wide adaptability to the range of human concern leaves altruistic and prosocial behaviors, more than most others, continuously open to a powerful ambiguity of interpretation. For there is no behavior that lends itself at once to both idealistic and cynical interpretations as altruistic behavior does. This fact is as centrally responsible for the degree of suspicion that surrounds interpretations of such behavior as it is for its current scientific interest. Granted that altruistic behavior reflects concern for others, does a person engage in such behavior because

he is really concerned with other people (really?) or perhaps because he hopes later to accrue some personal gain? Does a person engage in altruistic behavior because he cares for others, or because he is out for himself?

Such possibilities not only leave ordinary acts of altruism open to suspicion from a cynical public. They raise havoc with the interpretation of experimental data. Given a behavior that lends itself so neatly to such a wide variety of motives, how are we to know which motive "caused" it? For unless social philosophers and poets and some ordinary people are entirely wrong, not all of the antecedents of altruism are selfish, Machievellian and normative. There is such a thing as kindness for its own sake, or at least, mainly for the sake of another. There are such things as love and courage that stand apart from personal gain, that reflect commitment rather than selfishness. How can we distinguish these kinds of altruism from those others?

The enormous sensitivity of altruistic behavior to a variety of needs and motives, some clearly egotistical, others not, and the difficulty in interpreting altruistic behaviors can perhaps best be illustrated by describing two lines of apparently antithetical investigation. Staub (1968) has examined the impact of success and failure on subsequent charitability in children, and found that children who have experienced failure are subsequently more generous than those who have experienced success. Isen (1968), on the other hand, has found the reverse. Working with adults, she reports a series of three experiments wherein success always breeds greater helpfulness than failure. A subsequent experiment by Isen and myself (1969) similarly indicated greater generosity following success than failure, this time among children.

Isen calls her phenomenon the "warm glow of success," an instance of how pleasant affect tends to generalize itself to helpful behavior for others. By the same token, we should have to call Staub's phenomenon the "reparative flush of failure," suggesting that children tend to correct their image after significant failures by being a bit nicer than they might ordinarily be.

Are both true? Do both success and failure elevate the tendency to be helpful and charitable? Probably. In a subsequent experiment, Isen and I found that, indeed, failure could also lead to heightened charitability. And the difference between this experiment and our previous one, however seemingly trivial, is worth noting. In our previous experiment, an ostensible stranger entered the experimental room after the child had experienced success or failure. She made her "pitch" for a Childrens' Fund and left with us her collection box before she departed. Under these circumstances, children who had previously experienced success contributed more than those who had experienced failure. Their contributions went to an anonymous receiver. Our second experiment differed from this one in only one small detail: instead of having a stranger enter the room, we ourselves placed the collection box in the room, remarking that it had been left by someone and that we were collecting for charity. That was the only significant difference between the experiments, but it was a difference that counted, for under these conditions, failure children contributed more than those who had previously succeeded. Note that these children were not contributing to an anonymous receiver, but rather to <u>our</u> charity box.

We interpret these experiments simply. When the conditions allow for reparation of image, then those whose image needs reparation most

will contribute most. In Staub's (1968) study, the experimenter asked children to share their candies with peers in his presence. Children who had previously failed at the hands of this experimenter needed most to repair their image before him, so they shared most. Similarly, in the second study conducted by Isen and myself, we observed their failure and we were thought to observe their charitability. So failure children contributed enormously.

But more significant than these findings themselves, I believe, is the fact that they demonstrate the subtleties of altruistic behaviors, the ease with which they lend themselves to the gratification of one or another motive.

Observations on altruistic development

Although it is possible to distinguish normative (or perhaps cynical) altruism, which arises directly from assessments and maximizations of personal gain and loss, from autonomous or committed (or idealistic) altruism, they may not really be so separate as might appear. Rather, both appear to arise from the same matrix, though the learnings involved for the one are considerably greater than those required for the other. The next figure will illustrate this point. I find it increasingly difficult to conceptualize normative and autonomous altruism as two separate entities or capacities. Rather, they appear to be behaviors that emanate from the same constellation of capacities.

Insert Figure 1 about here

These data are drawn from the same experiment, wherein children play a game with a model, have the opportunity to contribute in his

presence. Then they play the game alone, and have a similar opportunity to contribute, now in his absence. Note that in this experiment, as in all our other ones, children uniformly contribute more in the model's presence than in his absence. But note also the remarkable similarity in the shape of the developmental curves. The presence of the model, we are forced to argue, adds a constant, as it were, to the already developed capacity for charitability. It does not change that capacity in a significant way.

Another study illustrated the same thing (Rosenhan, in press, a). Here we compare children who have been cognitively innoculated with the virtues of charitability with those who have simply observed a model contribute (our standard experimental paradigm). Again, cognitive innoculation seems to add a constant to the number of contributors. No basic change in the curves occurs. Cognitive innoculation elevates the performance of six-year olds, nearly to the point of non-innoculated ten-

---

Insert Figure 2 about here

---

year olds, but it elevates the performance of ten-year olds similarly.

We have invariably found that nearly all children who contribute to charity in the absence of the model, contribute also in his presence. This suggests that normative altruism is a necessary but not sufficient prerequisite for autonomous altruism. It makes sense, does it not, that normative altruism should precede autonomous altruism, much as in Kohlberg's (1963) scheme of moral development, Level 1 should precede Level 3. We expect then that most people are capable of normative altruism, that they are sensitive to the fact that being good to others in one way or another, pays off. But where do we go from here? How

does one get from the level of normative altruism to that of autonomy? I am not yet able to sketch in all of what must be the intermediate steps. But there seem to be two clear elements of affect and cognition that interactively enter into the progression, and I would like to explicate these here.

Affect -- I have already indicated that affect, dressed here as a prior success to experience, predisposes one to autonomous altruism. True, this finding was obtained in a short term experiment: the burst of affect was likely short-lived and the elicited altruism, trivial. But such findings give us confidence that the long range positive affects generated by success and competence promote a longer lasting "warm glow" which, in turn, may eventuate in a predisposition to altruistic commitment.

But there is another source of affect that seems critical to altruistic commitment, and it is the kind of affect that grows from "adrenalized" observational learning. In our study of committed Freedom Riders (Rosenhan, in press, b), we found that nearly all of them had parents who were themselves committed to some altruistic cause, and that these Freedom Riders had, when they were children, observed their parents and been influenced by them. Now, the kind of parental commitments that were involved here were "hairy," to say the least. One parent went off to fight in the Spanish Civil War, so outraged was he by the atrocities. Another, similarly outraged, enlisted in the Army during World War II even though he was quite overage and ailing. A third carried the respondent, then a mere boy, on his shoulders during the Sacco-Vanzetti parades. Most of the remaining parents were similarly involved with major causes.

I was at first inclined to interpret these data purely in terms of observational learning, and our first experiments, designed to test these naturalistic data more formally, reflected this inclination. Later I recognized a similarity between the experiences that our respondents had reported and the experiments conducted by Schachter and Singer (1963). Those experiments, you will recall, dealt with the generation of affect. Subjects were administered adrenaline without their knowledge and then exposed to a model who was either angry or joyful. The subjects in their turn manifested anger or joy. Now, Schachter and Singer needed to <u>administer</u> adrenaline for their own purposes and because their experimental situation was not sufficiently dramatic for the subjects to produce their own! But the life situation of our respondents during their early years made it quite likely that considerable adrenaline accompanied their observations of their parents. Consider for a moment the condition of a young child whose father is leaving to fight in the Spanish Civil War, or whose mother is breaking up the family, despite the comfort of their circumstances, and taking him away to a new land all because, in their present circumstances, the father is the Company Negro and, however well-paid he may be, this is no way to bring up children -- or even to live yourself. These circumstances very likely raise the adrenaline level of the child and convert such observational learning as occurs, to "affective" learning. In this instance, it is affective learning of a very special sort with very special content. We have reason to believe that such learning is more durable than most, more resistant to extinction or evaporation. And the content of this learning, the ideo-affective content, if you will, is prosocial, prohumane, "left-wing" in Tomkins' (1963) terminology.

Cognition -- In addition to the importance of a powerful affective experience that directs attention towards the needs of others, and perhaps interactively with such experience, we have reason to believe that certain features of cognitive development are implicated in altruistic commitment. Consider once again the Figure that we saw earlier. Note that in those data, as in the data from several other developmental

---

Insert Figure 1 about here

---

studies, there is a large increment in the incidence of altruism from age six to seven, much larger than in the years that precede or follow those ages, and much larger than one commonly obtains in developmental studies of other experimental behaviors.

How shall we interpret this jump in altruism from age six to seven? In this matter, I have been of two minds. First, the rise may simply be artifactual, reflecting the failure of very young children to be comfortable in a strange laboratory with unfamiliar people, a discomfort that manifests itself as a behavioral freeze (Rosenhan, in press, a). A similar observation, though in an entirely different context, has been made by Staub and Feagens (1969) in connection with aiding behavior in children. For myself and for these data, I find such an argument not merely unappetizing for its apparent triviality, but also wrong. If it were the case that very young children experience such a behavioral freeze in the laboratory, then one should expect such a freeze to dominate the behavior of young children across a broad array of experimental tasks. A survey of the developmental literature does not reveal this to be true.

As a consequence, I find myself more comfortable with my "other mind," which urges me to consider that at precisely the ages when children are more charitable, they have also been found to abandon their egocentricity, according to Piaget. Piaget's observations mesh neatly with these data. It makes good sense that the capacity to perceive and understand -- experience, if you will -- the universe from the point of view of another should enable one to experience another's needs which, in turn, should be related to altruism. By the same argument, the overwhelming presence of egocentrism in very young children makes them susceptible only to altruistic behavior that is dominated by reward and punishment. When experimental conditions allow only for the performance of autonomous altruism, they fail to understand what the "show is about."

If you will grant me that the teaching of kindness to others is not age graded, that we do not commence our teaching of prosocial behavior at age seven and not before, then you have here an interesting example of the interaction between teaching and what the cognitive structure permits. Education in prosocial behaviors of an autonomous sort has little impact on the child before he surrenders egocentricity, before he is capable of understanding the experiences of others.

If this be the case, one wonders about the generality of such findings as by Aronfreed and Paskal (Aronfreed, 1968) and Midlarsky and Bryan (1967). These workers found that children would engage in considerably more self-sacrificial behavior when such behavior was paired with joy in the recipient, indicating that empathy was a critical ingredient in both normative and relatively autonomous altruism. Their findings were obtained, however, with fourth grade children. Would

similar findings obtain say, with kindergartners, with children who had not yet forsaken egocentricity? Would such children be so able to experience the joy in a recipient as to lead them to abandon their own self-interest? If the interactive formulation that is presented here makes any sense, we should not expect young children to abandon their own self-interest for the interests of another, mainly because they are only able to experience another's joy dimly and mutedly.

The Development of Altruism

Where do these speculations, buttressed only in part by data, lead us? What can be said about the development of altruism? I propose that the very first stage of altruism, the kind that all people are capable of, is the altruism that is dominated by the dynamics of reward and punishment, what I have called normative altruism. The desire to get rewarded and to avoid punishment is what characterizes the behavior of very young children. Indeed, it is that desire that helps them learn something about the vast utility of altruistic behavior; that it can get you lots of things, that it can gratify many impulses instrumentally, that you can really do quite well by doin' good.

Once children surrender egocentricity, they become capable of an intermediate level of altruism, a level that is called affective altruism. It is a level that involves putting oneself in the shoes of another, perhaps experiencing his needs as if they were your own and then responding to those needs as you might respond to your own. The level requires both an alteration in cognitive structure from egocentrism to allocentrism, and the presence of empathy and sympathy. Having achieved such a level, children are capable of small autonomous altruisms, kindnesses that do not necessarily involve subsequent reward

or the avoidance of punishment, but kindnesses, I suspect, that do not tax too heavily their capacity for self-sacrifice. Empathy, sympathy and allocentrism are not such sturdy structures that they can continue to stand in the face of assaults from crucial self-interest. They are low density affects (Tomkins, 1965), affects that cannot command large and enduring segments of behavior. Altruistic commitment, or altruistic autonomy, our third and highest stage, requires more than these.

Although we have only naturalistic rather than experimental evidence to bear on this issue (right now, it is hard to see how we might accumulate experimental evidence), altruistic commitment requires the elements that characterize the earlier stages plus affective learning of the sort that was described for the Freedom Riders. Such affective learning on the prosocial side is as powerful, I believe, as trauma is on the psychopathological side. And it is probably maintained against extinction in precisely the same way as trauma is. You may recall from a study by Campbell and Jaynes (1967) that psycholgical trauma does not involve one-trial learning. In their study, a group of animals was severely traumatized early in their development, and then very midly traumatized each week thereafter for seven weeks. A second group was also severely traumatized early, but not administered the subsequent mild shocks. And a third group was only administered the mild shocks, but not the initial trauma. This experiment showed vividly that only the first group, which had been both traumatized and had that trauma mildly reinstated subsequently, showed dramatic effects of fear. The remaining groups showed no effects. Similarly for committed altruism. It is not simply because they have had one dramatic experience with

prosocial behavior, one vividly affective learning experience, that leads them directly to altruistic commitment. Rather, it is the fact that that experience is continuously reinstated by the ordinary opportunities for empathy, sympathy and simple altruistic behavior that life presents us with every day. Indeed, for humans it is just possible that affective learning of whatever content, predisposes them to <u>seeking out</u> opportunities for empathic involvement, rather than merely passively awaiting them. The sum and substance of the affective learning of prosocial behavior and its reinstatements is to organize values in such a way that concern for others stands near the peak of the value hierarchy, higher than personal rewards and private costs, sturdier than the Machievellian dynamics of upmanship and personal priority.

And if that is the case, if these speculations bear any resemblance to the truth, then the development of altruistic autonomy and commitment is of singular interest to theoretical phychology, not to speak of its interest to applied prosocial psychologists.

References

Aronfreed, J. Conscience and conduct. New York: Academic Press, 1968.

Campbell, B., and Jaynes, J. Reinstatement. Psychological Review, 1966, 73, 478-480.

Isen, A. M. Success, failure, attention and reaction to others: The warm glow of success. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Stanford University, 1968.

Isen, A. M., & Rosenhan, D. L. Success, failure and altruistic behavior. Unpublished manuscript, Swarthmore College, 1969.

Kohlberg, L. Moral development and identification. In H. Stevenson (Ed.) Child psychology: The 62nd Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963.

Midlarsky, E., & Bryan, J. H. Training charity in children. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1967, 5, 408-415.

Rosenhan, D. L. Some origins of concern for others. In P. Mussen, M. Covington and J. Langer (Eds.) Trends and issues in developmental psychology. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, in press, (a).

Rosenhan, D. L. The natural socialization of altruistic autonomy. In J. Macaulay and L. Berkowitz (Eds.) Altruism and helping. New York: Academic Press, in press, (b).

Schachter, S., & Singer, J. E. Cognitive, social and physiological determinants of emotional state. Psychological Review, 1962, 69, 379-399.

Staub, E. The effects of success and failure on children's sharing behavior. Paper presented at the meetings of the Eastern Psychological Association, 1968.

Staub, E., & Feagens, L. A child in distress: The influence of age and number of witnesses on children's attempts to help. Paper presented at the meetings of the Eastern Psychological Association, 1969.

Tomkins, S. S. Affect, imagery and consciousness. New York: Springer, 1963.

Tomkins, S. S. The psychology of commitment. I. The constructive role of violence and suffering for the individual and for his society. In S. S. Tomkins and C. E. Izard (Eds.,), Affect, cognition and personality. New York: Springer, 1965.

Footnote

[1] Supported by NIMH Grant #16462-01.

FIGURE 1

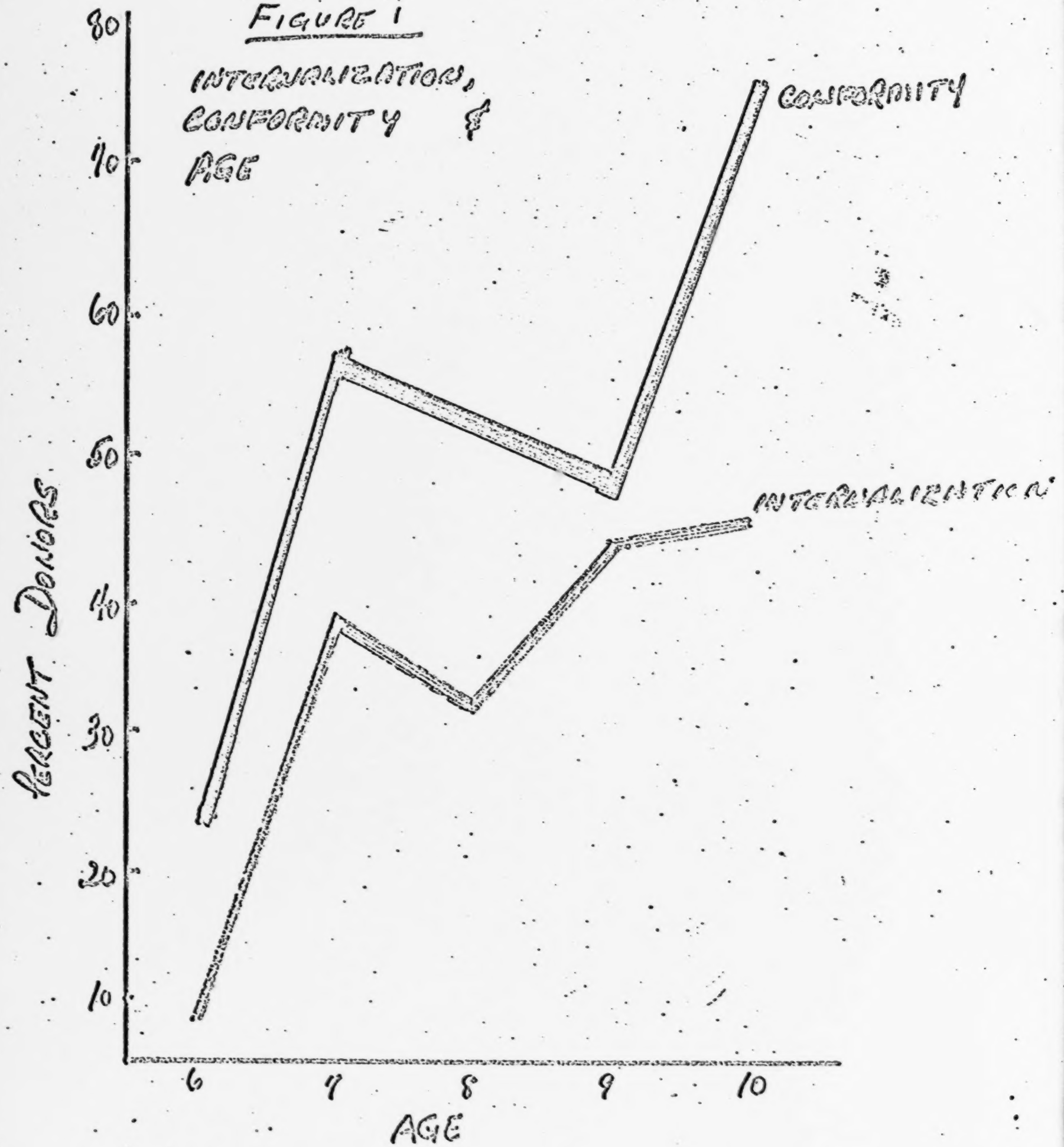
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
PERCENT DONORS
CONFORMITY
INTERNALIZATION
INTERNALIZATION, CONFORMITY & AGE
6
7
8
9
10
AGE

Figure 2

——— OBSERVATION OF A DONATING MODEL

— — — COGNITIVE INNOCULATION & OBSERVATION OF A DONATING MODEL